

PROBLEMS
OF
DISCIPLESHIP

H. BISSEKER, M.A.

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Problems of Discipleship

By H. BISSEKER, M.A.

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THIS FIRST LITTLE BOOK
IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER,
WHO LIVES FOR EVER WITH CHRIST—
AND IN HER SON'S HEART,

Foreword

to the Third Edition

THIS little volume was written with the hope that, within its very modest limits, it might be of service in guiding young men and women in the life of Christian discipleship. The attempt to treat great themes in papers so brief as these constituted a somewhat bold experiment. But there are many young Christians who, when perplexed by practical difficulties, receive more help from concise discussions than from those which are more elaborate, and on that account, if for no other reason, some attempt

of the kind appeared to be desirable. The fact that within a few years a third edition of this little work has become necessary encourages the author to hope that it has been able in some degree to minister to what is a real and very widespread need.

H. B.

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The Problem of Temptation

To what extent are we responsible for the temptations that come to us? In one form or another suggestions of evil are constantly assailing us. Though the fashion of the enticement change with time, the enticement itself continues. Not even years of steady resistance have availed to bring the struggle to an end. Is not this a ground for serious discouragement? Do not the frequent advances of wrong towards us argue a fault somewhere in ourselves? If we were the men and women we ought to be, should we not be free from temptation

altogether ? These are questions which trouble many sincere young hearts. Can we find a satisfying answer to them ?

I

We cannot say absolutely that a man is not responsible for the temptations which assault him, for these may at times be the fruit of some earlier unworthiness on his part. But we may say that he is not *necessarily* responsible for them. Temptation, of course, strictly means 'testing.' That is what it signifies in theology as well as in etymology. And 'testing' appears to be a necessity for us all. One condition of our growth in character, and therefore of our growth in service, is that we should be put to the proof and should 'stand' the

proving. A soldier is made not by the uniform but by the battle. As the untried recruit marches past an admiring crowd in his own country, there may well be courage, unwavering obedience, even heroism hidden away in his soul. But these qualities are not proved by a military display or a sham-fight. It is only in the stern discipline of warfare that the man's latent worth is revealed. More than that, it is the stern discipline of warfare which increases and develops, as well as displays, these hidden qualities of good. Nothing gives a soldier more courage than acting courageously. Nothing teaches him a stricter obedience than obeying. Nothing yields a deeper heroism than playing the hero. When the qualities of a man are tested,

and he stands the test, he receives them back intensified because of the challenge to which he has had to respond. And, yet more, the proof thus given of the soldier's worth and the progress in worth thus assured are obviously the stepping-stone to further service. The man on whom the captain will bestow the place of danger, which is the place of honour, will be the one who has been tried in conflict and has not been found wanting.

All this is no less true of the Christian warfare. We, too, are made by our testing-times. The proof of our worth is found not in our professions but in our conflicts. How, for example, could we demonstrate our truthfulness if we never had a chance of lying ; or our self-control if there were

no opportunity of self-indulgence ; or our choice of the highest if the lowest had no power of enticing us ? It is only when the evil way lies open to our feet (that is, when we are ' tempted '), that we can show the better way to be our own determined choice.

But the significance of temptation lies deeper than in a mere display of latent decision. The temptation is also our opportunity of further advance in character. Being tempted to lie, we cannot resist the suggestion without thereby growing stronger in truth. Being tempted to self-indulgence, we cannot resist without receiving an added self-control. Being tempted to yield to the lower, we cannot resist without becoming more nearly conformed to the higher. As the Sandwich Island

warrior of other days is said to have believed that the strength of every vanquished foe passed into his own body, so the power of every temptation overcome adds might to the victorious soldier of Christ. It is in enduring temptation that our virtues are not merely revealed, but also developed.

And in this spiritual warfare, as in the warfare of earth, it is the pledge thus given of our loyalty and the advance in loyalty thus achieved that equip us for more trusted and more valiant service in the future. It is in the hour of testing that our Captain proves our worth against the hour of opportunity.

II

Now, if this be true, there is a sense in which our temptations

are to be counted amidst our benefits. They are among life's supreme blessings, because they are among its supreme opportunities. The more experienced Christian, of course, will long ago have recognized this truth. But it is well to emphasize it for the sake of younger readers. Question after question put to the writer during the last few years has shown how many young Christians there are who confuse temptation with sin. When evil suggestions come to them, either as to action or as to thought, they are overwhelmed with a sense of shame. The mere fact that such suggestions can intrude themselves on their notice at all is felt to be a ground of humiliation. Sadly perplexed, they accept it as a proof that there

is something wrong in themselves.

To encourage those who are experiencing this difficulty, therefore, let us say unequivocally that *temptation is never sin*. We must always distinguish carefully between being tempted and yielding to the temptation. No one would say that a soldier suffered disgrace through having to fight. Though his contest were supremely fierce, calling for every ounce of strength he possessed to avoid his overthrow, yet so long as he holds his ground and still fights on, he has no shame. The shame is his only if he surrenders. Conflict is not the same thing as Defeat. Is not this true in the Christian warfare also ? Temptation is not the Defeat ; it is only the Conflict. There is no sin in being 'tested,' no matter how

strenuously we are forced to fight or how shameful the evils which seek to overthrow us. The sin begins only if we surrender. And what surer proof could there be than this—that Christ also, the Spotless One, waged the same conflict, being ‘in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin*’?

III

It will help us to view our own temptations in this light. In the evil thought which seeks admission to our mind, in the impulse to place self-pleasing before service and duty, in the appeal of every base and mischievous enticement, we are being ‘tested.’ Both our future character and our future service will depend on the manner in which we stand

the test. But there is no harm in the test itself ; the harm would only be to fail in it. We err in feeling that guilt attaches to the mere experience of temptation. A man is not necessarily responsible for the fact that evil suggests itself to his mind ; his responsibility lies in the attitude which he adopts towards the suggestion. The evil may be whispered from outside our souls. We ourselves are not accountable for that. The only question *we* have to face is, Do we steadily refuse it admission, or, when it asks an entrance, do we offer it a welcome and a refuge ? So long as our resistance is firm, we have no ground for shame. And though for some purpose of His own, God should allow the test to continue year after year, still

we have no ground for shame. Battle is not Defeat. Siege is not Surrender. Temptation is not Sin.

When the enticement of evil assails us, therefore, let us cease to hang down our head. In being tempted we are but sharing the universal experience. If others do not feel our particular temptations, they are subject to some from which we, perhaps, are exempt. We are all 'tested' in some way. We should rise to meet these testing-times unashamed and like men. God is proving us to see what stuff we are made of. We will show Him that He can rely on us. Each temptation shall call forth our latent fighting qualities. Each evil suggestion shall be a challenge to our better self to rise up and assert its sway. We will

remember not only the danger but also the opportunity. We will 'count it all joy' when we 'fall into manifold temptations.'

The Problem of the Besetting Sin

How may we gain the mastery over a besetting sin? To some Christians the problem of temptation is largely a problem of *one* temptation. We are certainly being tested in many ways, but at most points, perhaps, through the grace of Christ the assaults of evil meet with a sure defence. And yet there may be one place where our weakness is painfully apparent—to ourselves, if not to our friends. Should the powers of darkness assail us here, we always know ourselves to be in special danger. In other forms

it may be, evil wears an aspect which betrays it as our inveterate foe. But in this particular form it has a strange attraction for us, and though in our heart we know it to be an enemy, it allures us with the fascination of a friend. It is, indeed, a sin 'that doth so easily beset us.'

The form of our besetting sin will vary in different cases, according to our individual temperament, surroundings, or ancestry. But its existence, with more or less of strength in its hold upon us, most, if not all, of us would allow. If any should count himself an exception, it will probably be because he has not been brave enough to look himself in the face. Against this evil we have continually prayed and made repeated resolves. Many are reverently

conscious that they are gaining the victory, and for them the problem may have become one of special watchfulness rather than of special peril. With others the victory has been only temporary, and has been ended sooner or later by failure in the face of renewed temptation. If ours has been the more humbling experience, where may we find hope of an ultimate triumph?

I

The first thing to impress upon ourselves is that we must not dream of giving up hope. We are disloyal to Christ if we admit any case to be beyond His recovery. There are times when repeated failure may threaten our faith in His sufficiency. By some, perhaps, an evil habit

has been indulged for so long and with so great persistence that, even though we have known Christ's power in other parts of our life, we are tempted to feel that at this point things may have 'gone too far.' Therefore, let us admit freely to ourselves that to allow such despair is disloyalty to Him. The word 'hopeless' has no place in the Christian dictionary. 'He is able to save to the uttermost' is a sanction for our confidence which sets no limitations. To that confidence we must cling unfalteringly. Our first duty, therefore, is, in the name of Christ, to challenge our own soul to a certain hope not merely of an appreciable improvement, but of a complete and final victory.

II

Next, let us justify this challenge by trying to conceive of Christ's atonement as a living reality. Christ's work for the sinner embraces the gospel of His death and the gospel of His life. Now, among the reasons why, to many anxious souls, the truth appears vague and wanting in practical grip, must we not number the fact that it is so often conceived in one or other rather than in *both* of these aspects? We have need to realize that both the death and the life of Christ have a direct relation to this besetting sin.

Christ's death affects us personally. It concerns not only the world in general, but ourselves in particular. At Calvary Christ

did something for us which we could not do for ourselves. There, if we will now identify ourselves with that 'dying to sin,' we were 'reconciled to God through the death of His Son.' And, so long as in faith we thus associate ourselves with that death, what Christ accomplished at Calvary was accomplished, not merely for sin in general, nor even merely for our sin in general, but also *for this very sin of ours in particular*. Thus Christ's death has a practical meaning for us at this present moment, and all its virtue is now at our disposal with respect to this identical sin.

So much we are accustomed to believe, and it is a wonderful faith. But are there not some of us who stop at that point? To do so is to have received only

half of Christ's gospel for the sinner. The sinner needs not only a readjustment of his relation with the Holy Father, but also a complete deliverance from present sin. What, to take a specific example, some of us are eagerly seeking at the moment is a means by which this particular evil, which has so often mastered us, can itself be mastered. Has Christianity nothing to say to us concerning that? Is the gospel of Christ exhausted when we have remembered His death? Assuredly not! The gospel of Christ is not alone the gospel of His death, but also *the gospel of His life*. 'For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, *shall we be saved by His life*.' Christ's

work is not only to do something *for* us, but also to do something *in* us. He purposes not only to change our relation with the Father, but also to change us ourselves. And as the one was accomplished by His death, the other is accomplished by His risen life. As we were 'reconciled' by His death, we are 'saved' by His life. The slave of evil habit, therefore, can claim both the gospel of Christ's death *and the gospel of His life.*

III

What, then, is the gospel of His life? It can be put in a simple, practical manner. The gospel of Christ's life is twofold. It is, first, that He prays for us. He 'is able to save to the uttermost' because 'He ever liveth to make

intercession 'for us. How many Christian people are there who, as they grapple with their besetting sin, realize this massive truth with any sure hold? By the majority it seems to have been assigned a place among the theoretical beliefs of our religion. And yet how practical it might be! If 'the supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working,' what of the supplication of the Son of God?

The gospel of Christ's life is, further, that He dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, to transform us into His own likeness. This is what we need more and more to realize. It is the most practical of doctrines. Why does a man despair in the presence of his besetting sin? His line of argument is clear. He has got to close

grips with that sin again and again, and again and again it has overcome him. What, then, is the use of continuing to hope? If the sin is too strong for him now, will it not be too strong for him also in subsequent encounters? But the line of argument, if clear, is a false one. In urging that the sin will always be stronger than himself, the man assumes that he will always be the *same* 'self.' Yet he need not be. The gospel of Christ's life for him is that, by dwelling in him, He will transfigure that 'self' until its weakness is exchanged for strength.

We have all known men transformed by human friendship. Some youth, perhaps, has been inclined to be wild, and we have feared that certain disgrace

awaited him in the future ; when God suddenly sends him the gift of a true man's friendship. Little by little the stronger, purer influence prevails ; one after another the old habits are discarded and better ways chosen, until at last we say, ' He is *a different man* since he formed this friendship ! ' It is quite true—more exactly true, perhaps, than we understand. The communion of his nature with a nature higher than itself has so strengthened and developed it that we can scarcely any longer call it the same. Now, if our communion one with another can thus enlarge and purify our personality, how much more easily can we be transformed by union with Christ ?

When we are in danger of despair about our sin, therefore,

we need to realize this gospel of Christ's life as well as the gospel of His death. The full gospel is not only that He died, but also that *He is alive*. He is a Living Christ, who, as we abide in Him and He in us, is changing us into different men from those we used to be. Let the union with Him be close—so close that, to describe it, Paul's actual word is, 'we are saved *in* His life'—and we shall grow stronger than the sin which once was stronger than we. 'I see the right,' we have said; 'but human nature can't rise to it.' 'I've tried my best; what is the good of trying again?' Such a plea would be valid if the 'I,' the 'human nature,' were something fixed and unalterable. But they are not. They can be transformed. Where our present

human nature has been unequal to the test, an enlarged human nature will succeed. Where the present 'I' has failed, the transfigured 'I' will triumph. Thus Christ solves for us the problem of the besetting sin. And this is the gospel of His life.

IV

And it is insistence upon this aspect of truth which will make our message more vivid and real in our contact with others who may have begun to despair. Evangelical Christianity has often suffered through the incomplete exposition which some of its adherents have set forward. By placing all the stress upon the gospel of Christ's death, they have at least tended to represent our deliverance from sin as a

transaction entirely outside ourselves ; and to that extent they have rendered it vague and intangible to men faced by the present reality in their own lives of some dreadful, overwhelming evil. We need, with Paul, to offer men the *whole* gospel. Our deliverance from sin is in part a transaction outside ourselves, and in part a transaction within. It is a transaction outside us inasmuch as in the past Christ reconciled us to the Father by doing for us on Calvary something that we could not do for ourselves. That is the gospel of His death. It is a transaction within us inasmuch as in the present our deliverance from sin is not something which He does *instead* of us, but something which He does *through* us, by transforming our own

personality, enduing it ever more and more richly with purity and strength, until we become more than conquerors over all the forces of evil. That is the gospel of His life. It is by the proclamation of *both* gospels that we shall present Him to men as the all-sufficient Saviour.

On the Sense of Unreality in Prayer

‘WHEN I try to pray it just seems like talking to nothing.’ That somewhat blunt statement is a recent expression of a difficulty felt by many young Christians, and at times, perhaps, by some who have had longer experience. There are not a few men and women who, if they put their secret thought into words, would acknowledge that they pray chiefly because they believe it to be their duty to pray. Frankly, they find no enjoyment in the practice. In their heart of hearts they regard it as rather a mean-

ingless performance. For their prayers so often have a touch of unreality about them. God seems so far off. There are even times in which they appear to be speaking into empty air.

Is it possible to remedy this trouble? The subject is so important, that it is at least worth while to make an attempt.

I

Many men find prayer unreal because they hasten into it unthinkingly. Now, while prayer should always be childlike and natural, it is yet a very solemn undertaking, not rendered the less solemn by frequent repetition. A man needs to pause and consider with proper reverence the immense significance of what he is doing. It is a serious thing

to speak to God ; and, though some may pass from converse with the world to converse with the Deity in a minute without missing that sense of awe which should mark the approach to His footstool, most of us probably need a moment or two in which to collect our thoughts and to realize how great is the step we are taking. Even in the concerns of earth we require time to adjust ourselves to any quick change of atmosphere. After some big joy or sorrow has suddenly entered into our life, we tell our friends that we did not 'realize' it all at once. Some interval, however short, was necessary in which we could adapt our ideas to the altered conditions. Is it not likely, therefore, that a similar interval is needed when we seek

to transplant our souls from the atmosphere of earth to that of heaven ?

Forgetful of this, some men, in their prayers, begin praying and speaking simultaneously, as if prayer and speech were identical. But the use of words is only one small part of prayer. True prayer is the realization of the soul's intercourse with God, and this is best attained sometimes by speech and sometimes by *silence*. Many of us limit our attainment in prayer by laying stress on the former and underestimating or even disregarding the latter. If, instead of being in such a hurry to begin speaking, we would wait quietly and try to understand what it means to 'call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to

each man's work,' we should receive that reverent 'fear,' that sense of deep solemnity, which would, at its outset, make our prayer a much more *real* experience.

II

When we have thus waited until our souls have grasped the solemnity of communion with God, it is natural for us to 'make known our requests' to Him. In doing so we need to watch carefully that we never use a word which we do not mean with all our heart. Is there not sometimes in prayer an easy-going glibness which must be nearly related to hypocrisy? Are men never guilty of asking God for things which, if they read their own hearts honestly at the

moment, they are not prepared to accept at His hand, at the cost of sacrifice and reformation which the answer to their prayer would require in themselves? Now, if there is in our prayers anything that even distantly approaches this light and thoughtless petition, they will inevitably become lifeless and unreal. The danger is an easy one to fall into. We are unfortunately familiar with so many nicely-turned religious phrases, that they are apt to slip from our tongues almost unnoticed. Yet surely to speak an insincere word to God is no less than to offer Him deep insult. It is necessary, therefore, in our prayers to be ever on our guard lest a single insincere word should escape our lips. This may well result in our saying far less than

we have been accustomed to say. That in itself need not trouble us. Talking for the sake of talking is useless in prayer. It is merely part of the 'vain repetition' against which Christ has warned us. But if, as a consequence of our watchfulness in this regard, every word we did speak came from our deepest selves, and so was an expression of our reason, our feeling and our will, whatever else our prayers might be, they would at least be supremely real.

Several practical suggestions might be made, the adoption of which would afford greater freshness to our petitions.

The first step is obviously to make a strict rule never to allow in our prayers any conventional phrase or any expression

which, though not a part of the general conventional vocabulary, has yet through frequent use become too familiar to ourselves.

If we find at first that this resolve is being broken through the mere force of long-established habit, it might prove useful for a short period to adopt the expedient of repeating every request twice in different words. The necessity of finding a paraphrase for each petition would involve our thinking seriously of its meaning, and in this way would probably aid us to greater thoughtfulness in what we were saying. Such a method, however, is suggested only as a temporary measure until the habit of glib speaking has been destroyed.

Another helpful plan is to

make use from time to time of other men's prayers. So long as they are employed with intelligent reverence, these may be made both a genuine expression of, and a means of adding depth and breadth to, our own aspirations. The Book of Common Prayer is treasured by many for this purpose, and a volume like Bishop Andrewes' *Devotions* has aided thousands of men in their own communion with God. There are also some quite modern collections of prayers for family and school use which are certainly capable of assisting our devotions.

Perhaps a better system still is to form our own private liturgy—to gather from the Bible, from hymn-books, from the liturgies of the Church and from other manuals those prayers which

appear to us to express most perfectly our own longings and experience, and to make these the daily vehicle of our aspirations and thanksgivings and confessions.

Nor should we forget that our Lord Himself gave us one prayer as a model, and perhaps the best system of all is to take the different clauses of the Lord's Prayer one by one, and make each the starting-point and keynote of our own petitions.

Some such methods, it is hoped, would prove effective in saving us from thoughtless reiteration of language that is unweighed and unfelt.

III

Thus to have learnt a reverent awe for the God in whose Presence we stand, and a simple

sincerity in every word addressed to Him, will at least have reduced, and will probably have destroyed, the sense of unreality which may frequently have robbed our prayer of its living meaning. We shall find still further help if we can train ourselves in our prayer to avoid imitation of other people's methods. While we are deeply reverent in approaching God, we should be deeply natural also. Prayer, which must never, of course, be limited to mere petition, is intercourse with a Father. Everything, therefore, which helps our souls to realize that intercourse, is a part of prayer in its widest sense. The importance of remembering this lies in the power it gives us of casting off certain narrow limitations of method within which some men have confined

their prayers. Well-known conventions of posture or speech or season have become so generally established as to be a possible source of danger, and not a little of the sense of unreality in prayer is probably due to the tyranny thus imposed. Now, in intercourse with a Father that which is conventional and artificial is, of all things, out of place. It does not follow that the particular posture or terms of speech or hour of day in which my neighbour finds it most easy to realize his soul's communion with God will also prove the best avenue of approach for *my* soul. When I am seeking to spend time in conscious fellowship with my Father, I must act with all a true child's simplicity and naturalness, and must scorn every con-

vention. What I have to do is to discover the way in which *I*, with *my* temperament and outlook, find it most easy to realize His presence. Then, even though it be different from the way followed by every other man alive, that will be true prayer for *me*.

We need, in a word, to let our ideas about prayer be dominated by the thought of the Fatherhood of God. That thought will furnish a key to all the difficulties men find in prayer. And to cherish it will aid us in the immediate difficulty under consideration. For if prayer is intercourse with a Father, we must learn to regard it less as an obligation than as a happy privilege. Our prayer will lose in unreality as we come to it, not because we drive ourselves by a sense of duty, but

because we find joy in taking a Father of Love into our intimate confidence in every detail of our experience and hope.¹

¹To those readers who would like further help in this matter, let me recommend an unassuming but most valuable little book—*Letters to His Friends*, by Forbes Robinson. It has been printed for private circulation, and may be obtained from the Sub-librarian, Christ's College, Cambridge. No one, I think, will regret the purchase.

On Certain Answers to Prayer

ONE of the most frequent subjects of prayer is probably that of our own difficulties. Whether these concern our temporal comfort or our spiritual well-being, it is only natural that we should desire their removal. And thus we are often found requesting that we may be relieved of some special burden or set free from some special temptation.

Sometimes the result is encouraging. The burden is lifted. The temptation disappears. At other times, however, no such happy issue follows our petition.

The trial remains. The evil suggestion still assails us. It seems as if we had not prayed to God at all. And herein, for many, lies a perplexing problem—Why does God appear to disregard our cry? Has He not promised to answer His children? Then why is He silent when we call?

This earnest question—Does God hear?—is one that at some time in life has surely forced itself upon us all. The hasty response is often that God is unheeding. This may be a natural thought: it is the object of this paper to show that it is a mistaken one—mistaken because it does not go deep enough.

I

Are we always quite clear in our conception of what really

constitutes an 'answer' to prayer? The popular idea seems to be that God 'answers' our prayer when He does just what we ask. If, to take an example already offered, a man has entreated God to remove some particular trial from his life and the trial still continues, he feels that his prayer has met with no response.

But such a conception is beset with several serious difficulties. To begin with, would it be an act of love on God's part to substitute for the thing which His perfect knowledge showed to be the best that which our limited, distorted vision might prefer? Yet that is what He must do if, after promising that our prayers shall be answered, He can be said to grant the answer only by carrying out our behests. In that case

we ourselves are simply aspiring to supplant God as the Ruler of our lives, and we make Him either untrue or unloving. For if He does not always answer our prayer He is untrue to the promise made by Christ ; while if He does always 'answer' us in *this* sense, He is often unloving in preferring our whim to His own wiser purpose.

Further, such a theory of answers to prayer would, if put into practice, involve sheer chaos in the world's government. If God's promise in this matter were equivalent to placing in man's hand a blank cheque upon heaven, earth would simply become the arena for rival competitors in petition. Each of us could then demand whatever he pleased, and, on the theory, might expect to receive it. Yet what in that

case is to happen if two men present to God petitions the answers to which would be inconsistent and mutually exclusive? The theory is as impracticable as it is unwise.

The view in question, moreover, is seriously out of keeping with the Model of Prayer. In Christ's teaching about prayer the Divine Will is placed as the prominent, controlling factor. In His practice of prayer He laid the emphasis at the same point, '*Not My will . . . be done.*' Not even the Son Himself claimed in this sense to 'move the Hand that moves the world.'

Surely, therefore, when we regard God's 'answering' our prayer as His 'doing just what we ask,' we have somehow missed the true line of thought. And,

after all, why should we thus limit His 'answer' to a consent? We do not treat men in so arbitrary a manner. If we approach a friend with some request, and he, in his wider experience and surer knowledge, elects to decline it, we do not accuse him of leaving our request unanswered. A refusal may be just as truly an answer as a consent, and under many conceivable circumstances it will be a kinder one. May we not say this also of God's refusals? Is not His 'Nay' as real a response as His 'Yea'? When we have 'made known our requests' to Him and they are unfulfilled, it means not that He has declined to answer, but that His answer is the Love that refuses rather than the Love that bestows.

II

Does prayer, then, fail in such cases to make any difference? When we have desired a thing of God and His wisdom has withheld it, are we just as if we had not prayed at all? Assuredly not. Genuine prayer always makes a difference. God's response is never *purely* negative. Every true prayer brings a positive answer, even if its special petition remains unfulfilled.

The error in these cases lies not in the belief that our prayer will bring about some alteration, but in the point at which we look for the alteration to be effected. If I pray aright, I must expect a change to result from my prayer. But the change is often to be sought not in God, but in *me*.

For prayer, far from being an act of dictation, is rather one of submission. It is the soul's adoption of a right attitude towards God. It is not bringing God to my way of thinking : it is bringing myself to His. 'Not My will, but Thine be done.' Some men, when they pray, are anxious to do all the talking. They forget that prayer is an exercise for listening as well as for speaking. In all true prayer there are two voices—the voice of the soul speaking to God and the Voice of God speaking to the soul. It is because they do not wait for the second Voice that many miss the answer to their prayer. It is this Voice which will give us God's view of our situation and of our duty in it, and that is precisely the 'answer' we most of all need. For to see

our situation and our duty from God's standpoint will yield us the key to our proper action; and the communion in which this revelation is granted will add the strength required for that action's fulfilment. If, therefore, our prayer has resulted in a truer vision and a fuller power, who can say, even though the special petition offered has not been accomplished, that no answer has been vouchsafed? The response has been granted not by a change in God, but by a change in ourselves.

It is easy to apply this general principle to any one particular case. We are troubled, perhaps, by a certain temptation. We ask God to remove it. Now, if temptation itself were evil, the answer to the prayer would naturally

be the temptation's disappearance. But if, as an earlier paper showed, it may be a blessing, charged with infinite possibilities of good, God may—and in many cases does—resolve to let it remain. That does not mean that our prayer has no positive answer. There were two ways of granting such an answer. The temptation itself might be removed from us, or *our own power of resistance might be increased*. God's choice often lies in the second alternative. That is the key to the problem.

In the day that I called Thou
answeredst me,
Thou didst encourage me *with strength*
in my soul.

This was precisely Paul's experience with another type of difficulty. His repeated prayer

against the 'thorn in the flesh' did not issue in the removal of the trouble, but nevertheless it did not remain unanswered. 'Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My power is made perfect in weakness.' So real an 'answer' was this that henceforth the great Apostle was able to 'take pleasure in weaknesses . . . for Christ's sake.'

In other words, God's response to our cry is often not to withdraw us out of the battle, but to increase our power of resistance *in* the battle. If, as we pray day after day against evil, we are learning more and more surely through our prayers to adopt His view of the seriousness of

sin, of the necessity of conquest, of the power that is at our disposal, we are receiving an abundant 'answer' to our prayer. 'My prayers,' said a young man recently to the writer, 'apparently prove no medium for divine help, as the struggle still continues.' But was the inference a true one? Was not the very fact that the struggle *did* continue the certain proof that the divine help *was* being given? It was in the fact that he still loathed the threatening evil and that after months of conflict he was still waging strong and steady warfare against it, that he might have read the divine response to his prayer. God was answering him 'with strength in his soul.'

Is it not nobler to be enabled to fight bravely on than to be

allowed to flee from the field of battle? And, therefore, is not the answer which God actually sends in such cases a kinder, if also a harder, one than that for which we are often so eagerly looking? ¹

¹As the reader will doubtless have observed, the present chapter is concerned with only one aspect of the problem of prayer. It must not be taken as offering even a fragmentary exposition of the Divine method of response to prayer as a whole. The subject of intercession, for example, as to the efficacy of which the writer has an increasingly clear conviction, does not here come into view at all.

Wilful Sin : Can it have Forgiveness ?

THERE is a certain question, happily remote from the majority of Christians, which sorely troubles the mind of some. They are those who, having striven to serve Christ in all else, have yet fallen repeatedly in their conflict with one special sin. They have fallen, moreover, with their eyes open. Their sin has been a sin against the knowledge of Christ. So often have they sought the divine forgiveness, and so often has it been granted only to be followed by a further lapse, that they have begun to despair

of its restoration. They recall the saying of the writer to the Hebrews : ' For as touching those who were once enlightened . . . and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.' And they fear that their hope of pardon is sunk in those solemn words.

A letter recently received from a young man so well expresses the attitude in question, that its exact language will probably form the best summary of the problem. First citing the passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews, he continues :

' I feel miserable because I have quite recently fallen into sin, not merely a " mistake " or an

“infirmity,” but sin against the light. I feel that I have deliberately grieved my Lord. I must confess to my shame that it is not the first time by any means that I have done so. Before I have pleaded, “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,” but now I feel almost too ashamed to kneel and ask for forgiveness. . . . I feel that my action is like doing to a friend an unkind deed because I know he will readily forgive. The passage I have quoted leads me to think that a case like mine is hopeless. I am not hopeless, however. I feel somehow that God will still forgive me—“And yet I hear a Voice that bids me come.” ’

I

The first thing for such a man

to realize is that his sin, deeply serious though it is, is not a ground for final despair. The instinct which forbids him to be hopeless is a true instinct. Were it false, we should have to confess that a sinner had been discovered who, though he willed to be made whole, was yet beyond the Great Physician's power. No man who believes in the Christ of the Gospels will admit that. To do so would be disloyalty to Him. While we are great sinners, He is an even greater Saviour. When we have seen this, we understand that our true attitude to sin will be one of intense contrition, but never one of despair. The message not merely of our Lord's words, but of His whole life, is this: 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'

Here is one of the foundation-truths which nothing can cancel. Whatever subsequent views we may adopt, as Christians we can only receive those which may be built upon that.

Further, the New Testament, as a whole, recognizes the Christian's liability to occasional lapses which are confessedly against the main tenor of his life. Its doctrine of sinlessness, as is shown by the tenses of the verbs employed in the original language, relates to the *habitual practice* of a man's life (see e.g. 1 John iii. 6, 8, 9) ; it provides for the spasmodic failure, which a significant change of tense carefully differentiates from the fixed habit, by its teaching of the Divine Advocate and Propitiation (see 1 John ii. 1, 2). As we walk in

the light as He is in the light, even these incidental lapses will become impossible to us. We shall not only be forgiven for our individual *sins*, but we shall be entirely cleansed from *sin*, the principle and source of those separate acts of wrong-doing (1 John i. 7). Until that cleansing is perfected, however, all whose habitual practice is the sinless service of Christ may rely, when they have lapsed, upon His Advocacy and Propitiation.

II

What, then, is signified by the words cited from the Epistle to the Hebrews? Two points require notice in this connexion.

A careful study of the language employed shows that the passage does not, as at first sight it appears

to do, cut off the erring Christian from all hope of recovery. As Bishop Westcott has pointed out, the particular voice found in the verb rendered 'to renew' indicates that the writer is referring to *human* agency only. The Apostles themselves, he hints, claim no ability thus to 'lay again a foundation' of repentance in their converts' lives (see the immediate context in which the words are set). This, however, by no means rules out the possibility of *God's* applying the ministry of restoration which is thus said to lie outside the power of man.

Further, the type of sinner of whom the passage alludes is not the man who contradicts the whole tenor of his life by a rare lapse, but rather the man who

makes a *practice* of disloyalty to Christ. This, again, is a point which depends upon the particular tense employed ; but it will be unmistakably clear to those who can consult in the original the words translated 'crucify afresh and 'put to an open shame.'

It will thus be plain that the exact meaning of the writer is obscured in our English version. The text was misinterpreted centuries ago, being cited by Montanists and Novatians in defence of their refusal to absolve baptized Christians who committed serious sin. And in our own day the shade of meaning suggested by its English rendering has, doubtless, fostered a sense of hopelessness among those who have shared the experience under discussion. Any good commentary, however, will

confirm the exposition given above—that the solemn warning relates to the possibility of human agency and concerns only those in whom sin has become a continuous practice.

III

But this does not mean that we have liberty to sin. If the instinct to avoid despair is a true one, so also is that other instinct which tells the sinner he has ground for fear. When a Christian man deliberately allows himself to sin he is in a position of grave danger. Let him be clear, however, as to where the danger lies. The element of uncertainty resides not in Christ, but in himself. He need have no fear as to Christ's readiness to forgive him, being truly penitent; he

has cause to fear lest he himself should destroy his power of penitence. 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out,' is a truth that abides for ever unchangeable. But it affords no ground for false security. For it implies a twofold action, and while Christ will not fail in His part, the sinner may fail in his. If a man persist in sinning against the light, the doubt is not whether at his 'coming' Christ will 'cast him out,' but whether he himself will one day be any longer willing to 'come' *with all that sincerity of repentance which the coming implies.*

What we need in this generation to impress upon ourselves is the exceeding seriousness of sin—the exceeding seriousness, be it noted, not alone of sin's penal-

ties, but of sin itself. The effect of a man's deliberate continuance in any sin would be to produce not only a change in his relation to Christ, but also a change in himself. His life would illustrate stage by stage that dark progression indicated in a striking passage of Paul—(1) hardening of heart; (2) ignorance; (3) alienation from the life of God. Thus he would reach a point at which he would be 'past feeling' (see Eph. iv. 18, 19), and that stern self-rebuke to which in the presence of his sin he is sensitive to-day, would no longer exist to drive him back to Christ. Unless we see our sin to *be* sin—an awful wrong against Him and against ourselves; unless we yearn to *be* delivered from it and not alone

from its penalties ; unless, in a word, we are sincere in our sorrow for it and our purpose to forsake it, to ' come ' to Christ and ask forgiveness is to trifle blasphemously with Him and with His stupendous sacrifice. No man can thus trifle with the supreme sanctities of life without losing his sensitiveness of soul. His making a practice of sin would show indisputably that he had broken the relationship that once existed between himself and God (1 John iii. 6), and continued persistence must ultimately issue in a state of callousness in which his sense of sin, and therefore his sense of his need of a Saviour, would have become atrophied.

The ' sorrow ' which means still to cherish and cling to the evil is mere sentimental trifling.

The only sorrow for sin which is genuine is that which includes the purpose to forsake it. Let the backslider come to Christ again with *such* a sorrow, and he can claim to-day as truly as he claimed at his first coming that he has 'an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the Propitiation for "*his*" sins.'

The Problem of Suffering

How can a God of love allow suffering? That is one of the most puzzling problems ever put to the Christian believer. And perhaps it is one of the most frequent also. It is a favourite challenge of the agnostic. It is also a source of continual perplexity to the sorrow-stricken disciple. For the question is being asked within, as well as outside, the household of faith. When some great trial has vexed us year after year; when we have bravely tried to support it without complaint; when submission and prayer alike seem powerless to bring alleviation,—is it not only human for us to wonder whether,

after all, our life is in the care of a loving and Almighty Father?

The problem of suffering is the deepest of all problems, and we can scarcely expect in this world to find its complete explanation. Yet it is not so black as at first sight it appears. There is a good deal of light for those who will search carefully that they may find it. It is cowardly to adopt an attitude of despair and regard the enigma as hopeless. Each of us must quietly and reverently think out the problem between his own soul and God.

Now *is* a long-continued sorrow a proof that God fails to love us?

I

Men are constantly asking,
Why does God allow suffering?
If He were almighty, would not

His power prevent it? If He were all-loving would it not be abolished by His pity? Does not human suffering show either that He is not almighty or that He is not all-loving? In reality it does not demonstrate either position.

All such questions start from a false assumption—that what *hurts* is necessarily *evil*. And this false assumption itself rests upon another equally untrue—that present, immediate happiness is the chief end of life. But from the Christian standpoint present, immediate happiness is not the chief end of life. The chief end of life is to train us by the up-building of character for perfect happiness hereafter. Consequently, whatever hurts us now *is not* evil if it is capable of adding

sweetness and strength to that character. *Life is not an entertainment which we have to enjoy, but an education to which we are called to submit.*

II

Now is it open to question that many of the choicest qualities of character spring from suffering ? If there had been no sorrow in the world, life would have lost its chief sweetness. What would life be like if all the patience and all the sympathy in the world were taken out of it ? And yet if there had been no sorrow, such virtues as patience and sympathy would never have existed. If life for us were always easy and we never knew difficulty or rebuff, when could we have practised patience ? If life for others had

been always bright and they had never known pain or loss, when could we have practised sympathy? There are certain flowers which, while they open in the daylight, shed their fragrance only in the night. Much of the sweetest fragrance of human life also is shed only in days that are darkest. For it is by our sorrow that some of our rarest and most precious qualities are called into being and trained to completeness. Even Christ was made 'perfect through suffering.'

This thought furnishes merely a hint of what is really a large and impressive line of argument. But even so brief an expression of it can scarcely fail to be suggestive. The darkness of our suffering is no longer unrelieved when we see that a world without sorrow

must have been a world without patience and without sympathy. Nor is it for the milder virtues alone that we are debtors to life's sadder experiences. Much of men's strength and self-control, as the whole of their patience and sympathy, must be traced to the existence of pain and to its challenge for brave endurance.

III

What clear light is thrown for the Christian upon this aspect of the problem by the life and death of Jesus! If ever I am tempted to deem God indifferent to the human sorrow He allows, I have only to remind myself of His dearly-loved Son. In Him God not merely pitied, but Himself *shed*, human tears. 'Jesus wept.' When I read that gracious

and compassionate history ; when I see God's own Son standing by the tomb of one He loved, and weeping with a sense of human pain, then I know that God will never despise such tears as He Himself has shed.

And the light revealed by the life of Jesus is intensified by His death. Whatever the full meaning of that death may be, it shows beyond denial that the world's greatest good has issued from its deepest anguish. Does not this fact suggest an explanation of *our* suffering also ? If it is one of the divine principles that blessing springs from pain, may it not be possible that, in a humbler measure, but yet in strict reality, good for others or for ourselves shall arise from *our* anguish ? Surely that is what Calvary

suggests! The Cross of Christ is the greatest mystery in life, but it is also life's greatest explanation. It gives us the hope that our pain is not meaningless, but has for the world a significance which is profoundly inspiring. In the striking words of Paul, we may by our sufferings 'fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ.' If our pain is contributing to character in ourselves or in others, Christ is thereby making us partners in His work of saving mankind. Is it not worth while to suffer if we may attain to so high and sacred a dignity?

IV

Such thoughts as these shed radiant light upon God's attitude to our pain. His permitting it is

a proof, not that He does *not* love us, but that He *does*. If from our pain both we ourselves and others can derive life's sweetest graces and surest strength ; if by our anguish we may be raised to a high and mystic fellowship in Christ's passion, is it a failure on Love's part to allow the suffering ? Would it not rather be Love's failure to deny it ? To sum up the argument, the man who says that a God of Love would not allow suffering, usually has an inadequate conception of the nature of love and an inadequate conception of the nature of suffering. In suffering there lie possibilities of blessing, in love a capacity for beneficent sternness, of which he generally has not even dreamed. In our own generation **there are prevalent regrettably**

superficial views of the meaning of love, and if we are seeking to understand the mystery of pain, we must rectify them at the very outset of our study. Love is something fundamentally different from weak sentiment and indulgence. It is that unselfish devotion to another which leads one to seek his highest good, whether it is easy or difficult, whether it is praised or blamed, whether for the moment it gives pleasure *or inflicts pain*. It would be something less than love which denied us life's richest gifts that it might save us from its sorrow.

V

‘We may all see the bearing of this upon our own suffering. God has not forgotten us. ‘He feels for us as only perfect Love can

feel. In all our affliction He is afflicted. Our pain is allowed, not as a penalty, but as a mark of high confidence. He trusts us to suffer that our discipline may work out a deeper life for ourselves and so for others. The pearl-diver has no fear in leaving the sunlight for the black depths of ocean. He knows that below those dark waters precious gems are awaiting him, and he is glad to seek the darkness if so he can possess himself of the treasures hidden there. Beneath the dark waters of adversity there lie precious gems of character and influence for all who will brave the gloom in search of them. It is that we may find the treasure that God sends us into the darkness. 'I will give thee the treasures of darkness.'

To trust Him tenaciously under our present circumstances may need supreme faith ; but it will issue in supreme character.

The Problem of Merited Suffering

THE suffering of life is not confined to that in which the discipline would appear arbitrary and unprovoked. There is a sorrow which is admittedly self-inflicted. Much of our pain, physical and mental, traces its source to our own blindness and wrong-doing. We have thus a second problem—the Problem of Merited Suffering. What may we say of this? Has our folly placed our case beyond retrieval? Or is there hope and consolation even here?

I

These questions are answered by another—Have we repented? Have we seen our sin, mourned for it, hated it, turned from it? If so, the gospel of Christ has its message of comfort even in calamities which we have to lay to our own account.

It is easy to overlook this in our hours of self-condemnation. We find it comparatively simple to believe that a God of Love will not let the innocent suffer in vain, and therefore that the sorrows for which a man is not himself responsible will 'work together for good.' But when we have only ourselves to blame for our afflictions, we are assailed by a haunting fear that God stands entirely outside the experience

in a cold, judicial aloofness. At such times we need to strengthen our hold on the Christian assurance that God can make 'all things work together for good' to those who love Him. This is an elementary doctrine of Christianity, but it is the deep, elementary principles of our faith to which we always need to turn in the critical moments of life.

In the present case we need not turn in vain. It is true that this special suffering is the fruit of our own shame. We do not, in foolish self-delusion, call it a 'trial.' Humbly and frankly we speak of it by its real name. It is our 'punishment'—a penalty invited and deserved. But what is at first punishment for our own wrong-doing may always, so soon as it is accepted in a spirit

of meek submissiveness, be transmuted into discipline. Directly we confess it to be the just retribution for our sin, and thereby acknowledge also the seriousness and reality of our sin, we have dissociated ourselves in thought from the sin itself and allied ourselves with the God who hates it. Now this severance of ourselves from evil and alliance of ourselves with God not only brings us the divine forgiveness, but also involves in us a vital change of character. In mind and affection and purpose we no longer harbour that sin as a friend. We hate it as a foe. Its allegiance is forsworn; its dominion broken. Henceforth, between us and it there is a great gulf fixed. And thus the very penalty of our wrong-doing is

made a medium of growth in
goodness, and we ourselves have
proved it true

That men may rise on stopping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

II

In our self-inflicted suffering.
therefore, as well as in that which
we seem to bear in innocence, we
may rest firmly upon the Love of
God. God is great enough to
deal even with our mistakes.
All depends upon the attitude
that we adopt. Our punishment
should drive us to repentance—a
repentance so deep that we con-
fess our suffering to be righteous
and our sin to be shameful.
And when we have thus seen our
pain and the evil which caused it
from God's standpoint, there is

reason to hope that the chief end of our punishment is accomplished, and we may go to Him with earnest prayer that the suffering may be removed.

At this point, however, we have need to watch ourselves with special care. We must beware of thinking that our own repentance and the divine forgiveness will of necessity involve the withdrawal of our affliction. In our prayer for deliverance, no less than in the earlier stages of the experience, we must still preserve the spirit of quiet submissiveness. We have no right to *demand* that the penalty be cancelled. Its full effect in the rebuilding of our own character, or some purpose to be achieved through it upon the lives of others, may require its further continu-

ance. In either of these cases the Divine Love will decline to remove it from us. But even though it remain, it should no more depress us. So long as we live near to God, it will have lost its sting. It will have ceased to be retribution; it will abide with us as discipline. It will no longer be a curse; it will be one of life's blessings, linking us to the holy purpose of God and so to God Himself.

III

This, then, is the gospel of Christ for the man who is face to face with the problem of merited suffering. Let him by a deep repentance change his attitude towards his sin and towards his God, and there will be vouch-

safed to him the forgiveness which is in Jesus Christ. Then, repentant and forgiven, he may rightly seek relief from the consequence of his wrong-doing. But he will seek it in this spirit—that if God's answer be the granting of his desire, he will cherish reverently through his happier days the lessons of past discipline ; while if the divine answer be that his suffering must remain, he will bear it without complaint, bravely seeking by his sorrows to ally himself with the righteous purpose of God, and to make his very affliction a means of deeper communion with Him. As he suffers in this spirit, he will be proclaiming to his own soul and to the world around him that the character in which this discipline is issuing is of greater moment

than freedom from all earthly pain, and so he will be a constant witness to the seriousness of sin and the supremacy of the spiritual in life.

The Place of Feelings in the Religious Life

ONE of the commonest problems of the Christian disciple is that presented by fluctuation in religious happiness. It may be doubted, indeed, whether any Christians escape altogether the experience of reaction in their emotional life. How often our souls, warmed by the sacred influences of Sunday, by its holy friendships, its inspiring worship, its fellowship in prayer—have been chilled at the return of Monday with its different atmosphere and less sympathetic companionships! And such a

sense of reaction is only part of a wider experience. For the emotional side of our religious life as a whole, appears to have its ebb and flow. There are periods in which God seems to be working so manifestly in our lives that each day is a day of spiritual uplifting. Almost every new hour reveals some new wonder that He has wrought on our behalf. For a season we live on the heights of religious experience. But, for most of us at least, these periods do not last. Sooner or later they give place to times of comparative gloom and depression. Our hours appear dull and commonplace. The rapture and the wonder have passed. The reaction is painful. We are naturally puzzled to know what it means.

I

There is one explanation which some timid, self-distrustful disciples appear always to regard as the necessary one. Accustomed to view their religious feelings as the test of their spiritual condition, they infer from the change that they have, unwittingly perhaps, been guilty of some failure in duty or in devotion to Christ. This, of course, is always a possible solution of the difficulty, and at each repetition of the experience we shall feel the need of humble self-examination in case it should prove to be the true one. But surely it is a mistake to assume that the experience may not often have a different and a more comforting explanation. It is one

thing to say that sin will necessarily be followed by a loss of emotional joy; it is quite another thing to say that a loss of emotional joy must necessarily have been preceded by sin. In the first statement all would concur. To make the second an inference from it would be illogical.

II

That the inference is a false one several simple considerations will help us to perceive.

To begin with, our feelings are largely influenced by physical conditions. There are good men and women, to offer but one example, whose sense of religious elation is temporarily banished by the advent of an east wind! It is surely difficult to believe that

a change of emotion which can be traced to such a cause, must necessarily have a spiritual significance.

Again, if we will read the lives and the writings of Christians of other days, we shall notice that they, too, were familiar with the experience under discussion. The discovery that even men whose saintliness is a part of the Church's history were accustomed to this emotional reaction will naturally suggest the thought that it may have another explanation than that of personal unworthiness.

This impression will be confirmed by conversation with living Christians. As we talk the subject over with some of the best men and women we know, we shall learn that to them also the experience is quite a familiar

one. Again and again, they will tell us, at times when they have been honestly unconscious of any special wrong-doing in their lives, this reaction in feeling has come to them.

Then we may notice a singularly impressive fact. When we turn to our New Testament we shall find that, so far as the record of His sayings has reached us, Christ scarcely referred to our feelings. The present writer does not recall one passage in which He even used the word or made any allusion to our emotions in the sense inferred in our difficulty. And yet it is unthinkable that, if our feelings were the all - important test of our religious life, He would have left them so unnoticed.

III

These considerations suggest that the important place in the religious life assigned by many Christians to feelings is an altogether mistaken one, which cannot be justified by an appeal either to the experience of saints or to the teaching of Christ. They suggest, further, that the mysterious emotional reactions which we undergo may have an explanation independent of our own shortcomings and failures. That explanation is not far to seek. May not these periods of depression be a condition of our spiritual progress? A wise gardener knows the uses of a hot-house, but he knows its dangers also. He has plants which at stages of their development may derive

great benefit from a sojourn there. But he does not allow certain of them to remain perpetually in its enervating atmosphere. If they are to be healthy and vigorous, these must leave the genial warmth and face the colder air outside. May it not be so with the plants which the Heavenly Father has planted? Our spiritual growth may be encouraged by intervals passed in the genial environment of exalted emotion. But our strength is secured by learning to face life's colder atmospheres—to trust God even when we cannot feel Him, to do our duty for the duty's sake, though no rich reward of joy should wait upon it. For His work in the world God wants not men who *feel* much, but men who *are* much and *do* much. His education of ~~us~~ is therefore

directed less to our emotions than to our character and capacity for service. His aim seems to be not to keep us in a constant state of spiritual ecstasy, but to perfect our growth in goodness. And for that purpose times of humdrum, commonplace feeling may be as necessary as periods of religious exaltation.

IV

The explanation so given would account reasonably for the emotional reactions to which from time to time we are subject. But it naturally raises another question. If our religious joy is thus subject to fluctuation, can we be sure of its reality ?

This inquiry may unhesitatingly be answered in the affirmative.

There seems no reason why the

mere fact of variation in our religious joy should invalidate its claim to being genuine. Such a doubt might be justified, perhaps, if the change were incapable of any reasonable explanation. But if, as the experience of Christians shows, it has repeatedly been found a means of growth in faith, it possesses an explanation so entirely adequate that the suggested doubt is at once robbed of its force.

The key to this part of the difficulty seems to lie here. In thinking of our religious emotions, we must learn to look for the proof of reality, not in their constancy, but in their intensity. I can best explain my meaning by a simple illustration. Several years ago I was told of the existence of a small but very

beautiful lake. The blueness of its waters and the grandeur of the panorama of which it formed a part, were said to have afforded it a charm entirely its own. I travelled many miles to see that lake. But the day of my arrival was a day of mist. As I sat in the hotel and looked out from my window, I could see nothing but cloud. The whole landscape was enveloped. An hour's disappointed waiting followed, and at its end I caught a glimpse of what I had come to enjoy. For five minutes the mist lifted, and I gazed upon an exquisite picture of the lake and the everlasting hills beyond. Then the clouds returned, and again the view was obscured. *But I had had my vision.* It was useless now for men to come to my side and

tell me that, because I could not see it at the present moment, that glorious scene did not exist. My glimpse may have been a brief one, but its genuineness did not depend upon its length. Reality is not to be expressed in terms of duration. A passing glimpse may be as true as a constant vision. Moreover, even though I could have been persuaded to doubt my own perceptions, were there not thousands of other men who had seen that lake and those hills right through the generations? When I had added their testimony to my own, all the clouds in the world could not have made me believe what I had seen to be unreal.

V

It is a similar method of reasoning that may convince us of the

reality of our vision of God. There are moments of emotional uplifting when our sense of His Presence is strong, vivid, direct. We *know* that He is with us. Our souls have a glimpse of Him, the intensity of which is the pledge of its reality. What if such moments are followed by periods in which a cloud appears to obscure the more immediate glory? The present darkness cannot cancel the Light we *have* seen. When we have once lifted up our eyes to the Everlasting Hills and have found that thence cometh our help, no mists of earth can destroy their existence for us. And even if we could doubt the reliability of our own spiritual sense, is it not confirmed by the testimony of tens of thousands who in all the ages have

seen the vision for themselves ?

We must not fall into the error of estimating reality by duration. In the spiritual realm also a transitory glimpse may be as true as an unbroken vision. An emotion that is occasional may be as valid as one that is unvarying. We should seek the proof of the reality of our religious joy, therefore, not in its constancy, but in its intensity. And the vision that came to us in the clear light of an open day is a sufficient and a reasonable ground for patient confidence when for a season the cloud has overshadowed us. One is irresistibly reminded of Tennyson's lines :

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice, 'believe no more,'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the godless deep :

A warmth within the breast would
melt

The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd, '*I have felt.*'

Such a protest against the tyranny of reason was never more timely than to-day. We admit, of course, that there is an emotionalism which is both false and delusive. But this fact affords no logical ground for the popular habit of depreciating the sane and genuine emotions of the human heart. Experience is a valid factor in evidence. In God's wise education of our spirit our religious joy may from time to time suffer reaction. Yet no reaction can rob any one of us of that sure ground of confidence '*I have felt.*'

VI

One other point, perhaps, is worthy of notice in this connexion. There may be a danger of confusing our religious joy with 'the Witness of the Spirit,' and of fearing lest through the variation of the first the second should be rendered uncertain. Let us, therefore, remind ourselves that the Witness of the Spirit is a witness 'that we are children of God.' In the fuller description of John Wesley, it is 'an inward impression on the soul whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out; and I, even I, am reconciled to God.' Now, exultant religious joy is a natural

accompaniment of such a witness, but it is not identical with it. The 'inward impression of the soul' can exist without it, and is essentially independent of it. This, indeed, we know by experience. For the temporary reaction in feeling does not make us doubt whether our sins are blotted out and we ourselves reconciled to God; it merely removes, for a season, our sense of exultation in the fact. The two results are entirely different. We must not, therefore, on the one hand, imagine that the constant Witness of the Spirit entitles us to constant religious exhilaration, or, on the other hand, fear that a passing loss of the exhilaration imperils the Witness of the Spirit. The two are really quite different possessions.

VII

The place of feelings in the religious life, to sum up, is found to lie in the sphere of discipline as well as in the sphere of evidence. While there is unquestionably an emotional reaction which is due to personal sin—and against that we must ever guard ourselves with humble watchfulness—there is also a reaction which forms part of God's system of education for His children. Exuberant joy is an atmosphere in which certain fruits of our spiritual nature are fostered and developed. For this cause the Divine Husbandman allows us from time to time to breathe it. But as our soul's constant environment, it might prove enervating. Therefore it is succeeded

by one less exhilarating, the change marking not the divine displeasure, but the divine purpose to ensure our fuller and more vigorous growth. When we have seen this truth, we shall welcome all such reactions with brave and uncomplaining faith. We shall trust our Father's guidance through the valley of deep darkness as truly as in the green pastures and beside the still waters. And, even though our exultation tarries, we shall be kept in perfect peace, because our mind is stayed on Him.¹

¹The psychological aspects of the problem treated in this chapter, though most suggestive and important, do not fall within the purpose of the present volume.

The True Test of a Religious Life

THE teaching of the previous paper raises a further question of the first practical importance. Those who accept its main contention must clearly forsake the common custom of judging the state of their religious life by the state of their feelings. For if the fluctuation in our religious emotion is often quite independent of any special wrongdoing of our own, it can scarcely be a sure index to our spiritual condition. Where, then, is a safe test of that condition to be found? When doubts and questionings arise, how may we assure

ourselves that our union with God is still unbroken ?

I

For our answer we must turn directly, of course, to the words of Christ. And in this, as in all else, His teaching has the clearness of a great simplicity. There are several possible tests which He either ignores or openly rejects. He assigns no place, as was said before, to the test of feelings. That particular criterion has not sufficient importance even to secure His notice. He entirely repudiates the test of effusive professions of devotion. 'Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.' He has nothing but scorn for the test of formal exactitude in religion. 'In

vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.' He will not even accept the test of what may have appeared conspicuous service in His name. 'Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy Name, and by Thy name cast out devils, and by Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.' But there is one test to which He gives marked and repeated emphasis: '*By their fruits ye shall know them.*' Again and again, with an insistence which never wavers, this great principle is proclaimed in the teaching of Christ. *The true disciple is to be discerned by his practice of the obedience of love.*

The point is one of such supreme moment that, even in a brief

paper, it demands fuller illustration. We may pause, therefore, to recall a few of our Lord's memorable pronouncements. The man, He says, whose life is like a house built firmly and securely upon a rock, is the one who hears and does His words.¹ The man who has found true rest of soul, is the one who has come to Him as his Teacher and received His precepts.² The man who finds entrance to His kingdom, is the one who does the will of His Father which is in heaven.³ It is whosoever shall do that will, also, that is His brother and sister and mother.⁴ Those who are welcomed by Him at the judgment are the people who have fed the hungry, given drink to

¹ Matt. vii. 24. ² Matt. xi. 28.

³ Matt. vii. 21. ⁴ Matt. xii. 50.

the thirsty, taken in the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned.¹ Those who are condemned are the people who have neglected these duties.² By this shall all men know His disciples—if they have love one to another.³ That man has received the first and greatest commandment who has learnt to love God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself.⁴ That man is a follower of Christ who, repudiating himself, takes up his cross in obedient imitation of Him.⁵ The supreme test of the disciple's love for Him is that he keep His commandments.⁶ He who keeps His commandments shall abide in His love.⁷

Matt. xxv. 34. ² Matt. xxv. 41.

³ John xiii. 35. ⁴ Matt. xxii. 35-40.

⁵ Matt. xvi. 24. ⁶ John xiv. 15.

⁷ John xv. 10.

To accept Christ as Lord and Controller of our life, in a word—*this* is to enter His kingdom. To as many as receive Him, to them gives He the right to become children of God, and the proof that we *have* received Him and *have* entered His kingdom is *that our lives show the fruit of obedience to His will.* ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. . . . Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.’ To put the argument in a single sentence, the fruit is the certain pledge that the tree is alive and healthy.

II

This important teaching of our Lord is confirmed, with the power of impressive reiteration, by the apostle who drank most deeply of His Spirit. 'Hereby know we that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him : but whoso keepeth His word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected.'¹ 'Ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him.'² 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.'³ 'He that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him.'⁴

¹ 1 John ii. 3-5. ² 1 John ii. 29.

³ 1 John iii. 14. ⁴ 1 John iii. 24

‘For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.’¹ As in some great creation of music the master-theme is lost to the ear only to rise into prominence again and again, so in the writings of the beloved disciple this same note fades away only to return with an imposing resonance. And it is in perfect harmony with St. Paul’s majestic passage—‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.’² The teaching of the two great apostles is one with their Lord’s—that the true disciple is to be discerned by his practice of the obedience of love.

III

But is not this a doctrine of Salvation by Works? By no

¹ 1 John v. 3. ² Rom. viii. 14.

means. Those who imagine it to be so must remember a very important distinction. We are now dealing not with the *cause* of our salvation, but with its *results*. Let us seek the help of a simple illustration.

The reader has doubtless at some time in his history suffered from disease, and, having confidence in his physician, has taken the remedy he offered. How did he know whether he was cured? The decisive proof lay in his restoration to strength. It was as day after day he recognized that the disease had lost its hold and that he had recovered his physical and mental vigour, that he knew the cure to have been effected. But thus to make the possession of his strength the test of his present health was not to attribute his

recovery to that strength. The new strength was the *result* of his restoration, not its *cause*. The cause was clearly the remedy brought by the physician he had trusted. Nevertheless, the one certain proof that the cure had taken place, lay in the indisputable fact that this same strength *had* resulted from it.

And so when, in the spiritual realm, we find the test of our present health in the strength wherewith we obey the words of Christ, we are not attributing our recovery to our own strength. That strength is the *result* of our restoration, not its *cause*. The cause was the remedy brought by the Great Physician we have trusted. Yet if, in moments of depression, we are ever anxious to assure ourselves that the remedy

has really been effectual, it is surely in this strength that the decisive proof will be found. It is as day after day we can recognize sin to have lost its hold, and spiritual strength to be our possession, that we can know our recovery to be a real and indisputable fact.

IV

This truth may be put simply in another way. We believe that, whether through sudden impulse, gradual attraction, or persistent striving, we entered the kingdom by a 'new birth.' That birth, as every birth, simply meant the beginning of a new life. The new life was a new *kind* of life. Just as we had hitherto enjoyed a physical and a mental life, so we then received a spiritual life ;

and so distinct is this spiritual life from the other forms of life in our possession that there is no possible danger of its confusion with them. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' Now, this spiritual life consists in our personal relationship to God and in the character and conduct which grow out of that relationship. If, therefore, through any emotional reaction, a man is ever tempted to doubt the continuance of his new relationship with God, a simple, unerring test is always possible to him. Let him ask himself whether he is still striving with the Spirit's help to love God with all his heart and to make the words of Christ the rule of his life. If so, he has clear evidence

that the spiritual life which began for him in his new birth has not been stifled. There is no possibility of confusion. That love of God and obedience to Christ could not be the fruit of his physical or of his mental life ; it could only grow from a spiritual life within him. Therefore, the fact that it *is* still growing is the sure proof that that spiritual life is still flourishing within him.

This, then, is the true criterion of our religious life—Is that life producing in us ‘the fruit of the Spirit’? Are we in thought, speech, action, and temper proving that we have learnt of Christ? If we have assurance of this, we need no added assurance from our emotions. Even though for whole days and weeks together God in His wisdom should

withhold the more exultant feelings which have often cheered us, we can press steadily forward without fear. For we shall then have learnt the secret of those who walk and do not faint.

On the Value of Sermons

IT is to be feared that many sermons fail to achieve their purpose. And the fault does not always lie with the preacher. A significant admission of this fact is contained in a letter recently received by the writer. 'Since becoming a Christian,' said an unknown friend, 'I have endeavoured to listen to sermons and to get good from them. But my thoughts wander away in all directions, and often when the speaker ceases, I find myself weary, uninterested, and not very clear about anything he has been saying.'

The ineffectiveness of a sermon, then, may be a disciple's problem as well as a preacher's problem, and it is from this standpoint that the present volume is concerned with it.

I

In so far as the failure of a sermon is due to its reception on the part of its hearers, does it not depend, at least to a large extent, upon their omission to recognize its integral place in the scheme of public worship? A true conception of the sermon's importance is probably conditioned by a true conception of public worship; and perhaps our doctrine of public worship is not as clearly defined or as frequently expounded as for this, if for no other, reason would appear

desirable. One cannot but fear that the popular conception of a church service, in so far as it is analysed at all, is that of a series of disjointed actions. Over against such a view we need to set the truer conception of the essential unity of the act of public worship. Its several parts really constitute one undivided whole, and until the worshipper has recognized this he has missed its full dignity, if not its full inspiration.

This is so practical a point that it will be worth while to explain in some detail what is meant. Indeed, it is a clear explanation of this that will furnish an answer to the difficulty with which the present paper is to deal.

II

In every true act of worship

there are two elements—our approach to God and God's approach to us.

We draw near to God as a body of believers. There is a grace belonging to each man's separate intercourse with God ; but there is also a grace attendant upon our *united* seeking after Him as members one of another and of Christ. The first grace we obtain in our private devotion ; the second in our public worship. In public worship, therefore, we come to offer our common praise, to repeat our common confession, to make known our common supplications ; and so to reconsecrate ourselves to God's service. All this we do in our hymns, in our prayers, and in the offertory (for this last, rightly considered, is not a financial

interlude, but a central point in the service, symbolizing the offering of ourselves). These several details belong to the essence of public worship, and there can be no greater mistake than to make them, as there sometimes appears a tendency to do, merely an introduction to the sermon. Taken together, they furnish the means for the soul's approach to God.

But this is not all. It is not even first. Before we have been seeking God, He has been seeking us. In our public worship we not only wish to let God hear our voice, but we also seek to hear His. In every service, if we have the ready ear, He has something to say to us. There are two portions of the act of worship in which this aspect is more prominent.

It is so in the reading of the lessons. The experience of successive generations testifies to the presence of that divine element in the Bible which we call inspiration. The words which have brought their message of comfort, of warning, of heart-searching, of enlightenment to others, have their message also for *us*. When, therefore, they are being read to us in our worship, it is that we may wait with reverent expectancy to catch the accent of the Divine Voice speaking through them.

That Voice should be sought for also in the sermon. If God has nothing to say through the man in the pulpit, he ought not to *be* in the pulpit. The last thing the writer wishes is to make any sacerdotal claim for

the ministry; but he desires most emphatically to make for it the *prophetic* claim—that is, of course, not the title to foretell the future, but the title to ‘speak forth’ the word of Another. It is this claim that men may be a vehicle of God’s truth which lies behind our having separate orders of preachers, whether lay or clerical. If, before approaching the service, the preacher has waited on God in quiet study and prayer, placing at His full disposal all his powers of mind, emotion, and will, he will have received from God some definite message for the people. It is to deliver that message that he preaches at all. He is in the service to speak, not as a man, but as a prophet. If he is not a prophet he has no right to be a preacher.

III

Now, the congregation ought to recognize this as well as the preacher himself. As they listen, they listen not to a man but to a prophet. He is a human prophet, of course, and therefore liable to human imperfection and limitation. Let this be made indisputably plain. There is not intended here even a remote suggestion that all his words and all his teachings have the stamp of divine authority. Like every other man, he is susceptible to the influence of personal bias and of unrecognized error. Yet, none the less, if he is a true preacher, called of God, there will be in his sermon a Word, deeper than either bias or error, which those who have the ears to hear may

recognize as the Word of God Himself. The authority belongs not to the preacher, but to the Word. That Word is known to be of God, not because it is spoken by the man (a reason in every sense inadequate), but because it carries its own authority in gripping and holding the receptive listener's life.

This prophetic claim for the preacher—if I may anticipate a possible objection—does not assign the man an undue importance in public worship. It is the one thing which saves him from it. The act of worship, rightly conceived, is so solemn an undertaking that, if the preacher is merely speaking as a man, we have no right to lower God's service by allowing him the prominence which he now receives.

In that case, how is it possible to justify a custom by which any man, though he should be the holiest man of all the ages, breaks into the sacred communion of the worshippers' souls with God, and for a large part of the period of worship intrudes particular ideas of his own human creation? Unless he speaks as the messenger of God, he is entirely out of place. His only *raison d'être* in the pulpit is that he brings not his own word, but God's.

IV

Now, if we accept this conception of the sermon as a vehicle of *God's* Word to our souls, we have an incentive to careful, reverent attention which nothing else could give. Just as our

voice reaches Him in hymn and prayer, so shall we expect His voice to reach us here. With such an expectation, who would not listen ? And we never need listen in vain. The writer well remembers a saintly old lady who always ' had a good time ' in the sermon. It did not matter how poor the sermon was ; she invariably received a blessing. As a boy, he used to find an affectionate amusement in this ; now he knows that she was profoundly right. She did not go to church to hear a fine preacher ; she went to hear God. She did not stay away because some less attractive preacher was expected ; so flip-pant a view of worship had long been outgrown. In the preacher she saw not a man, but a prophet. Beneath the human voice she

listened for the divine voice. That is why she always heard it. If we all did the same, we should all find the same reward.

On Reading the Bible

ONE of the commonest difficulties of Christian discipleship lies, it is to be feared, in the problem of our use of the Bible. In theory, the Bible holds a high place among the sources from which we draw our inspiration. In actual fact, as many young Christians would acknowledge, it is too often an almost negligible factor. The reason for this is not always or of necessity an unworthy one. There are some earnest but uninstructed disciples who are baffled because they simply do not know what parts of the Bible to read. Many of

the portions to which they have turned fail either to interest or to help them. And even more, perhaps, have, for want of a wiser system, fallen into a mechanical method of reading, which admittedly robs the study of any living inspiration and makes it a mere duty rather than a cherished privilege. In either case the Bible is not proving the means of grace it ought to be. Is it possible in any way to obviate this practical and widespread difficulty?

It will, at any rate, help to throw some light upon the problem if we begin by recognizing the subject to be a much wider one than certain of us may have supposed. To the fullest and best use of the Bible two studies are necessary—study *of* the Bible

and study *about* the Bible. There is a danger lest each of these should be neglected by one or other type of reader. Some of us are apt to forget that intelligent understanding is no more at a discount in the study of Scripture than in anything else. Others of us need to be reminded that no amount of critical and literary knowledge concerning the Bible can take the place of knowledge of the Bible itself. We must determine at the outset, therefore, to avoid both dangers by pursuing both studies.

I

Let us at once frankly admit that these two studies are of unequal value. Study *about* the Bible is of far less importance than study *of* the Bible. Of all books to be read for equipment

in biblical knowledge, the first and chief is the Bible itself. At the same time, this fact once recognized, we must allow further that there are both an intelligent and an unintelligent reading of the Bible. And an intelligent reading requires not only that we should know the sacred books themselves, but also that we should know a good deal *about* them. For the Bible is really not one book, but many. It is a 'Divine Library' of books, produced by different types of men at different periods of history under different conditions of life and for different kinds of readers. Now the key to much that is found in any writer's words or spirit will often lie in his own personality, standpoint, or circumstances, or in the personality, standpoint,

or circumstances of his particular readers. To turn our gaze upon one of the sacred books without information on these points is like looking at a scene without the proper sense of perspective.

Moreover, since these books, though many in number, have yet been united by the guidance of God's Spirit into one great 'Library,' revealing His purpose and will for men and the means of our redemption into perfect fellowship with Him, a rich light is cast upon any individual writing when we see not only the beauty and teaching it possesses in itself, but also the place it occupies in the scheme of the whole.

All this is so obvious that it seems almost foolish to stay to express it. Yet, while every one

would admit its truth in theory, the fact that so many Christian people ignore it in practice largely accounts for the difficulty we are now considering; and it therefore becomes necessary for the truth, self-evident though it is, to be emphasized yet again.

How, then, can a young Christian acquire the knowledge needed for an intelligent reading of the Bible? I will give a short list of volumes useful for this purpose. It does not in any sense aim at being complete. Many standard works are omitted. My desire is not to furnish a catalogue but to meet a particular need of certain young students. The books named, it will be seen, are separated into two groups. Those marked (a) are suitable for beginners, though serviceable also

for more advanced students. They are generally small and cheap in price. Those marked (b) should be added by readers who can pursue the study further.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

- (1) *General:*
 - (a) Robertson's 'The Old Testament and Its Contents'; Gray's 'Critical Introduction to the Old Testament.'
 - (b) Driver's 'Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament.'
- (2) *Special Monographs:*
 - (a) Findlay's 'The Books of the Prophets'; Davison's 'The Praises of Israel,' and 'The Wisdom-Literature of the Old Testament.'
 - (b) Articles, Genesis, Exodus, &c., in Hastings' 'Dictionary of the Bible'; Davidson's 'Old Testament Prophecy'; George Adam Smith's Commentaries on 'The Book of Isaiah' and 'The Book of the Twelve Prophets'; George Adam Smith's 'Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament'; Orr's 'Problem of the Old Testament.' (The last two well represent different

sides of the Higher Criticism controversy.)

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

(1) *General:*

- (a) Peake's 'Critical Introduction to the New Testament'; McClymont's 'The New Testament and its Writers'; 'Cambridge Companion to the Bible.'
- (b) Zahn's 'Introduction to the New Testament'; Moffatt's 'Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament.'

(2) *Special Monographs:*

- (a) Stalker's 'Life of Christ'; Robertson's 'Our Lord's Teaching'; Armitage Robinson's 'Study of the Gospels'; Findlay's 'The Epistles of Paul the Apostle.'
- (b) Articles, Jesus Christ, Paul, Gospels, Matthew, Mark, &c., in Hastings' 'Dictionary of the Bible'; Burkitt's 'The Gospel History and its Transmission'; Stanton's 'The Gospels as Historical Documents'; Weiss' 'Life of Christ'; Lake's 'Earlier Epistles of St. Paul'; Ramsay's 'St. Paul the Traveller.'

Such a list is, of course, very fragmentary, but it may prove

helpful to some readers, however gratuitous it is bound to be in the case of others. If those who have not seen them would buy and master at least the volumes denoted (*a*) in the list, they would find a most welcome light shed upon their daily use of the Bible.

II

Study of this kind, however, highly important as it is, is only preliminary to the study of the Bible itself. How can we make the most of that? Can any suggestions be offered by means of which the listless, mechanical method of reading is to be overcome? Four possible plans may be indicated here.

Our search for help may be either indefinite or definite. That is to say, we may, in the one case,

read to obtain any light that Scripture may cast on any subject, or, in the other case, read in search of guidance on some specific detail of belief or conduct. For want of better terms we will call these two methods the 'indefinite' and the 'definite' methods. Both, of course, are wise, and it may be helpful to suggest two illustrations of each.

1. The first of the 'indefinite' methods of study is the familiar plan of reading a certain short portion of Scripture at regular intervals in the hope of receiving blessing for mind and heart. This is the system which, in the experience of many, has issued in mere 'routine' perusal of the Bible, and it may therefore seem strange that it should be offered to neutralize that effect. But

the 'mechanical' impression associated with such reading does not belong to the method itself; it belongs to the spirit in which the method is applied. And the simple plan of reading any part of Scripture with the 'indefinite' hope of blessing is far too precious to be given up merely because we may have failed in our use of it. This method may be adopted without the sense of routine, if, instead of committing ourselves to the artificial divisions of chapters in our English Bibles and reading somewhat hastily on to the end of each, we take fewer verses and read carefully *to find the most inspiring thought in that particular portion*. A good plan is to take one thought as our companion for every day's life. Now, if each morning's reading

is spent in search of that thought, it at once assumes an important relation to our life as a whole ; and, being no longer an addition imposed on the day's life, but an essential element in it, the study of the Bible ceases to be irksome and becomes a real inspiration.

2. It is well, however, not to confine our study of Scripture to the reading of short portions. The Bible is made a much more living volume for those who will study each of the books which compose it, as an individual whole. Every one of these books—history, prophecy, epistle—is a separate document, either written or compiled for a particular circle of readers at a particular time and with a particular purpose. Let us, then, in the light

of this fact, study each of them not merely as a collection of helpful sayings, but as a unity complete in itself. A special radiance is thrown upon the pages of the Bible for those who will give time and trouble to add this method to the simple occasional reading already mentioned. Valuable guidance is provided in several ways. A concise and trustworthy commentary to each book, such as those published in 'The Century Bible' and in 'The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges'; an illuminating modern edition of the various documents like Dr. Richard Moulton's 'Modern Reader's Bible'; and so careful and dignified a modern translation as that of Dr. Weymouth—to be used side by side with, not in substitution for,

the revised English text—will illuminate many an obscure passage for the reverent painstaking student. This extended study, moreover, will give a vividness to our grasp of the sacred writings which will sensibly affect the interest derived from their perusal.

III

It remains to mention what we have termed the 'definite' reading of Scripture—that is, the reading which seeks not merely any light on any subject, but also guidance on some specific detail of belief or conduct. In our own ignorance we feel the need of instruction in truth, and our search must have a two-fold object. We must learn truth in thought and truth in action.

3. We must learn truth in thought. In these days we need to know just what we believe. If our intellectual faith is vague, we are at the mercy of assailants, and others to whose belief we ought to afford strength look to us in vain for support. But if we are to know precisely what our religion teaches, we have to take a wide and careful survey of the sacred writings. Argument for a view taken from isolated texts is no longer admissible. Such a procedure is possible only for those 'to whom,' in the language of Charles Kingsley, 'Scripture is an easy book, of which they have mastered every word by the convenient process of ignoring three-fourths of it.' It is necessary in every item of our faith to find what is taught by

Scripture as a whole—to read one passage of revelation in the light of other passages, and to estimate the contribution each makes to a given subject according to the place it occupies in the gradual unfolding of the divine revelation.

See the living interest added to Scripture when it is handled in this way ! Let a young Christian set out, with the aid of God's Spirit, to formulate his own system of belief. What, for example, has been revealed as to the nature of God ? What precisely does Scripture mean by His 'love' ? What does it signify by His 'anger' ? What reason is there for holding that there is a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead ? What ground have we to assert that Christ was human ?

On what basis do we rest our faith that He was divine ? What precisely were His own claims about Himself ? What light do His words throw upon the meaning of His death ? What may we know about the Holy Spirit—His nature and His work ? What is sin ? How does the death of Jesus affect our sin ? What are the conditions of the forgiveness of sin—on the divine side and on the human ? In what way does Scripture claim to be inspired ? How much does it unfold with certainty about the future life ? Here is a preliminary list of questions for the student !

Now suppose that, instead of merely reading Scripture in what we have called the 'indefinite' method, a young Christian will also take up questions like these

one at a time, and read steadily through the various books—looking out specifically for all that they say on the particular topic selected, collecting those sayings together in a large manuscript note-book, and finally comparing them one with another until he discerns the message which they unite to proclaim—he will discover a purpose and an interest in his study of the Bible which will make that study an altogether different thing to him! When one subject has thus been worked out, he may, before turning to another, write out his results in a short essay, which will certainly be valuable to himself, and, if the work has been done carefully and intelligently, will probably be of value to other people also. As every one will see, a whole

lifetime would not suffice to exhaust this treatment of Scripture.

IV

4. Side by side with our search for truth in thought we need to carry out a search for truth in action. We have not only to hold right ideas concerning our faith: we have also to learn its right application in practice. To make our Bible study a definite means of progress in duty is, perhaps, the surest expedient for removing from it that sense of mechanical formality which so easily tends to affect it.

In order that our lives may be true in action, we need to grow in knowledge and in grace. (1) We must grow in knowledge. It is not enough for us to be willing to do the right: we have also to

understand clearly what the right is. Again and again the reason why we do wrong is that we fail not in our devotion to duty, but in our vision of duty. For our spiritual as well as our physical perception may lose its keenness and precision. We may show a colour-blind man a piece of green paper, and he will tell us that it is grey ; but it is none the less green. There is also such a thing as spiritual colour-blindness. We may show a man wrong and he may say that it is right ; but it is none the less wrong. This being so, we must watch carefully lest we also suffer from defective spiritual vision. From time to time we need to bring our vision to the test of an unerring standard, and that standard is found in the Bible when it is read with a

reverent intelligence. It is there that God's will is gradually disclosed until it is seen in its fullness and perfection in Jesus Christ. It is there, therefore, that we can test ourselves, taking our own thought of right to God's Word and comparing it with His. The result is as wholesome as it is humiliating. For that Word is a mirror showing us ourselves as we are and ourselves as we ought to be. Thus each day it may help us to take God's thoughts in place of our own and to think them after Him, so correcting our defective vision and teaching us to see light in His light (cf. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

All this has its obvious application to *knowledge in relation to character*. Our daily reading of Scripture will gain an immense

practical interest when we utilize it for definite inquiry as to what we ourselves ought to be and to do. As in the study of his creed suggested above, so in this study also, let the young Christian work with pen and notebook beside him ; let him read with the set purpose of discovering *God's* thought of the particular virtues he knows that he ought to practise, and of the particular duties he knows that he ought to fulfil ; let him collect together all the material which Scripture affords, and then, comparing passage with passage, endeavour to form a careful and reverent judgement upon each separate point.

We all, for example, admit the Christian virtues to be binding upon us. But how many of us are aiming at these virtues as

they are in God's thought, and how many are aiming at them merely as they present themselves to our own imagination? It is well to take these virtues one by one and make a separate study of each as it is expounded in God's Word. What, to give a few examples, is the real meaning of faith, of hope, of love? What is humility? What is generosity? What is temperance? What is unselfishness?

Or, to carry our investigation into the realm of Christian duties also, what does Scripture teach precisely about the duty of forgiving others; of abstaining from judgement upon our neighbours; of acting as peacemakers; of controlling the tongue; of regulating our thoughts; of exercising unselfish anger; of fulfilling our

responsibilities in the home, in the business, in the State ?

A new zest would be added to our study of the Bible if we set ourselves to prepare careful little essays on these and similar points, and so, in all our conception of virtue and duty, to adopt God's thoughts, which are ever higher than our own.

The same principle has its application to *knowledge in relation to service*. How often we are apt, in mere thoughtlessness, to approach our Christian work according to our own uninstructed ideas ! But the Bible, ready to our hand, is a very storehouse of education in the methods and principles of service. Here, then, is yet another line of investigation. What—to suggest but a few out of many possible questions

—are the laws which govern influence? To what motives in men are we justified in appealing on behalf of Christ? What is the relation of prayer to influence? What particular methods are best adapted to men and women of any particular temperament? To these and similar inquiries we may find the true answer by studying both the general principles laid down by different scriptural writers and the methods illustrated in their records of particular workers. And to have mastered those principles and methods would be to have risen to altogether new possibilities of usefulness.

(2) A course of investigation like that outlined above would result in a large increase in our knowledge as to character and

service. But we need to grow in grace also. It is not enough to have new and better ideas; we must have, too, new power in which they may be carried into practical effect. This aspect of life also makes important demands upon our study of Scripture.

How, for example, may we obtain more *grace for growth in character*? When we have learnt God's idea of the various Christian virtues, in what way can we make them a part of our lives? When we have been taught God's view of the various Christian duties, by what means can we find strength to fulfil them? To this end, what is the gift of the Holy Ghost? On what conditions is He bestowed? What are the true weapons with which to meet temptation—and not only

temptation in general, but also those special allurements to which we ourselves are peculiarly susceptible ?

How, again, may we obtain more *grace for growth in service* ? In what way are we to rely upon the Spirit's help ? How do the divine and the human elements mingle in our work ? How may our motive be purified ? What was the secret of power in the achievements of the different heroes of our faith ? The whole subject is rich in practical questions, any one of which, adopted as a serious line of investigation, would add a new vividness and inspiration to our reading of the Bible.

That reading naturally proves wearisome when we allow it to become indefinite and mechanical.

The method of taking up specific subjects one after another, and seeking to collect and master all that Scripture teaches upon each, is a remedy which will intensify both the intellectual interest and the practical value of all our study of the sacred writings.

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